

East India Company Records

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Background

The East India Company (EIC), or more formally, the Honourable East India Company (HEIC) was created in 1599 in London as a private company given exclusive trade rights to *the East Indies*, defined as everything from the Cape of Good Hope to the Strait of Magellan. This was travelling eastward, and thus included about three-fourths of the world's area. In 1657, Cromwell gave the HEIC authority to fortify, colonize, and militarily defend its ports of trade. Disagreements and struggles with trading interests in other countries, most notably the Dutch East India Company (in Dutch, Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or VOC) led to the HEIC being granted full governmental and political control as well as trade rights.

In 1784, the British government (or Crown) instituted the Board of Control to represent their interests and oversee HEIC's actions around the world. In 1813, the Crown began allowing other companies to trade with some countries formerly under exclusive control of HEIC. By 1833, HEIC trading exclusivity was fully revoked and HEIC had only political control and governance over its former trade empire. In 1858, the India Office (a British Crown cabinet office) was established, fully replacing the EIC.

The India Office assumed governance of the countries formerly controlled by HEIC and became responsible for records of those countries. In 1937, Burma was made a separate cabinet office (The Burma Office), but India and Pakistan were granted independence in 1947, with Burma following in 1948. Both the India Office and the Burma Office were disbanded, and their records deposited in a separate archive on Blackfriars Road in London, called The India Office Library.

Important Information for Researchers

1. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma were divided into administrative areas. Three were presidencies (Bengal, Bombay, and Madras), with the area *Indian States* being several non-contiguous areas.
2. Sometimes the term *Indian States* was used to describe things which included all four administrative areas.
3. Sometime Punjab is referred to as if it were a presidency rather than a state.

4. Armed forces in India include three distinct groups with separate records. HEIC was authorized to have its own army, usually referred to as East India Company Service (EICS or HEICS) or by their presidency (Bengal Army, Bombay Army, and Madras Army). The company also hired and trained Indian natives as a supplementary army led by British officers. This was called the *Indian Army*. Finally, the British Crown was represented by troops from the United Kingdom who were part of the British Army, referred to as *regular army*. Occasionally, the wrong term was used by those who didn't know the difference or didn't check their source.
5. *Regular Army* chaplains sometimes performed baptisms or marriages for EIC personnel. These were reported by the chaplains to the army, and are thus included in the army records called *Chaplains' Returns*, which are searchable on FindMyPast.
6. The EIC fleet docked on the Isle of Dogs in the Thames River in London. This was in the parish of Poplar, which has close ties to the EIC. Consider searching records in Poplar for missing information on families with connection to EIC.
7. Pensions for EIC personnel were administered by the Poplar Fund. Records of applications for pensions for widows and orphans are indexed and searchable through the India Office Family History Search (see below).
8. Some records (1709-1871) of the Poplar Fund are held in the Bancroft Library, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 277 Bancroft Road, London E1 4DQ. Tel: +44 (0)20 8980 4366. These are supplementary to those held at India Office Library.
9. Find the presidency or jurisdictions for places under the control of the East India Company by using Thornton, Edward. *A Gazetteer of the Territories under the Government of the East-India Company, and of the Native States on the Continent of India*. London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1854. 4 vols. In the FHL, the call number is British book REG 954 E5t, available online through the link in the FHLC or try https://dcms.lds.org/view/action/ieViewer.do?dps_pid=IE104392&dps_dvs=1352953094837~590&dps_pid=IE104392&change_lng=en.

India Office Library

The India Office Library (IOL) is part of the British Library (Asia, Pacific, and Africa collection). The catalog is included in A2A (Access to Archives), fully searchable as part of TNA's Discovery (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/>). The central focus of the IOL is the territories now India, Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh, and the major part of the records concern their administration before 1947. As a result of the widespread commercial activities of the East India Company, and of India Office

involvement in the external relations and defence policy of pre-1947 India, the Records also include a substantial body of historical source materials for neighbouring or connected areas at different times. Among the most significant of these are:

St Helena (to 1834);	Afghanistan, Russian and Chinese Central
Cape of Good Hope (to 1836);	Asia, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim
Zanzibar, Somalia and Ethiopia (19 th cent);	(late eighteenth century to 1947);
Red Sea, Arabian Peninsula, Gulf States,	China (early seventeenth century to 1947);
Iraq and Iran (c1600-1947);	Malaysia and South-East Asia (to c1867);
Indonesia (to c1825); Japan (17 th century);	Indian emigrants to the West Indies, south
Sri Lanka (c1750-1802);	and east Africa, and Fiji.

The India Office website is described below.

Research Starting Points

India Office Family History Search (<http://indiafamily.bl.uk/UI/>) is a website which includes a searchable database drawn from over 100 widely varied sources. These include 300,000 baptism, marriages and burials from Christians in EIC countries, service records of EIC naval, merchant seamen, and army personnel, pensions, journals, newspapers, memorial inscriptions, early wills (to 1723) and a large collection of biographical info. It is occasionally updated, with the latest additions being the beginning of entering passenger lists. A full list of the sources in the index (with notes on completeness) is at <http://indiafamily.bl.uk/UI/Sources.aspx>. The results of searches for names or places is exceptionally accurate (few or no false hits).

Family History Library Collection is extensive, but mostly on microfilm. Three indexed collections are available online, comprised of 566,529 deaths and burials, 678,024 births and baptisms, and 183,048 marriages taken from ecclesiastical records of the three presidencies in India – Bengal, Bombay, and Madras. Two unindexed collections are available, both written in Urdu. The balance of the FHL extensive holdings are on microfilm, described in Register of The East India Office Records (FHL staff, Salt Lake City: 2001, FHL book REG 942 D23ei). This register is four parts – Bengal, Bombay, Madras, and Indian States & Misc. Other. Each part is divided into five tabs, namely Church, Merchant Marine, Military, Pension, and Probate. The Indian States have a sixth tab, Miscellaneous which contains cemetery, emigration & immigration records.

Families in British India Society (FIBIS) (www.new.fibis.org/) has a free online database of over 1 million names, a research wiki (fibiwiki), a social network (members only), expert guides and a news feed. The database is drawn from a wide variety of sources, including military, church, census, cemetery, probate, and many other records.

British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA) (www.bacsa.org.uk) was founded in 1977 to documents, preserve, and photograph thousands of British and other European cemeteries, isolated graves, and monuments in the area from the Red Sea to Hong Kong. They publish cemetery and church records, biographical notes, and user-contributed family files. Their BACSA Archive is fully searchable online.

India Office Records and Private Papers website guides research in records not online. (www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelppregion/asia/india/indiaofficerecords/indiaofficehub.html) is the hub for extensive India Office Library web pages. The record classes and contents are listed on the pages *Arrangement of the records and list of classes of documents* at www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelppregion/asia/india/indiaofficerecords/indiaofficearrangement/indiaofficearrangedrecord.html.

Reference Sources

- The best source is the India Office Records and Private Papers website (see above).
- The British Library has a list of external web links at www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpprestype/webres/worldwideweblinks/index.html (click on Family History Research to see the external links to EIC family history web sites).
- Glossary, abbreviations, and dictionary: <http://indiafamily.bl.uk/UI/Dictionary.aspx>
- Farrington, Anthony, *Guide to the Records of India Office Military Department*. London: India Office Library and Records, 1982 (FHL book# 942.1/L1 A3f)
- Moir, Martin, *A General Guide to the India Office Records*. London: The British Library, 1988 (FHL book# 942.1/L1 A3m)
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- Bailey, Peter A., *Researching Ancestors in the East India Company Armies*. [England]: Families in British India Society (FIBIS), c2006 (FHL book# 942 M2bp)
- Articles in Family Tree Magazine:
 - Bailey, Peter A., "The Honourable East India Company Army", Aug 2007 pp.20-23
 - Morgan, Richard, "Records of the British in India", "Part 12: Indian Ships: The Indian Navy" July 2008